

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (Previously presented) A collapsible handrail mechanism for steps or a ladder, comprising:

a handrail for use with stairs, the stairs connected to an inner stringer, the inner stringer and an outer stringer jointly pivotable about a pivot point;

a stanchion connected to the handrail and located between the outer and inner stringers and pivotally mounted to at least one of the stringers;

a latching mechanism through which the stanchion passes and to which at least one of the stringers is pivotally mounted at the pivot point;

the latching mechanism having a slide plate that prevents substantial downwards movement of the stanchion, a top plate that prevents substantial upwards movement of the stanchion, and a side plate preventing substantial sideways movement of the stanchion;

wherein, in operation of the handrail mechanism from a stowed position, when the stringers are lowered, the stanchion is thereby forced to slide on the slide plate causing the stanchion to pivot about the stanchion's mounting up into an operational position in which the handrail is raised upwardly and away from the stairs.

2. (Previously presented) The collapsible handrail of claim 1, wherein the stanchion is pivotally mounted for rotation in a single plane.

3. (Currently amended) A handrail mechanism that has at least a stowed position and a down position comprising:

at least one stair pivotally connected to an ~~outer~~ inner stringer spaced apart from, and oriented parallel to, an outer stringer;

a handrail oriented generally parallel to the outer stringer;

at least one stanchion joining the outer stringer to the handrail;

a latching mechanism through which the at least one stanchion passes, the latching mechanism having a slide plate that prevents substantial downwards movement of the stanchion, a top plate that prevents substantial upwards movement of the stanchion, and a side plate preventing substantial sideways movement of the stanchion;

wherein, in operation of the handrail mechanism from the stowed position to the down position, when the outer stringer is lowered, the stanchion is thereby forced to slide on the slide plate causing the stanchion to pivot about a stanchion mounting pin into the operational position in which the handrail is raised upwardly and away from the outer stringer.

4. (Currently amended) ~~The handrail mechanism of claim 3, further comprising an inner stringer spaced apart from, and oriented parallel to, the outer stringer,~~

A handrail mechanism that has at least a stowed position and a down position comprising:

at least one stair pivotally connected to an inner stringer spaced apart from, and oriented parallel to, an outer stringer;

a handrail oriented generally parallel to the outer stringer;

at least one stanchion joining the outer stringer to the handrail;

a latching mechanism through which the at least one stanchion passes, the latching mechanism having a slide plate that prevents substantial downwards movement of the stanchion, a top plate that prevents substantial upwards movement of the stanchion, and a side plate preventing substantial sideways movement of the stanchion;

wherein, in operation of the handrail mechanism from the stowed position to the down position, when the outer stringer is lowered, the stanchion is thereby forced to slide on the slide plate causing the stanchion to pivot about a stanchion mounting pin into the operational position in which the handrail is raised upwardly and away from the outer stringer;

wherein the stanchion is located between the outer and inner stringers and pivotally mounted to at least one of the stringers.

5. (Previously presented) The handrail mechanism of claim 4, further comprising stairs pivotally mounted to the inner stringer.

6. (Previously presented) The handrail mechanism of claim 4, wherein the latching mechanism is pivotally mounted at a pivot point to at least one of the stringers.

7. (Previously presented) The handrail mechanism of claim 3, wherein in the stowed position, the stanchion is located generally parallel to the outer stringer.

8. (Previously presented) The handrail mechanism of claim 6, wherein in the down position, the stanchion is located generally perpendicular to the outer stringer.

9. (Previously presented) The collapsible handrail of claim 3, wherein the stanchion is pivotally mounted for rotation in a single plane.